

Types of Sector Assessment

I hesitate to add more categories or another typology to the many already floating around. Yet I feel some further clarification of levels or types of sector assessment may be needed to improve communication and analysis on problems and needs of sector assessment work.

I'm finding the following typology useful for my own thinking. It specifies four levels of sector analysis. Each would logically be built on a base of the preceding levels, implicitly if not explicitly. To what level the assessment should be carried or at what level the assessment should be focused depends on the purpose. Most assessments are hybrids, doing bits and pieces of each level of assessment without comprehensive or self-contained coverage of any level.

- (1) sector survey - descriptive profile: static and/or historical.
- (2) sector analysis - assessment of dynamics of sector's operations in producing its outputs (how do the major factors in the system interact through time), and of the effect of alternative interventions or changes in the system on achievement of the various goals, which need prior specification.
- (3) sector strategy - identification of general means of getting from A to B, e.g., from a system that does X to a system that does Y (logically, this would be based on sector analysis, explicit or implicit).
- (4) sector plan or program - set of activities to be undertaken: a plan logically should include or be based on a strategy, as rationale for the program.

My appropriation of terms is somewhat arbitrary, though in accord with some common usages. The most difficult semantic problem for effective communication of meaning, perhaps, is with the term "analysis", which generically is more or less synonymous with "assessment" and could refer to all four categories, although "sector analysis" buffs have tended to assign it the more limited meaning used here.

In reviewing Professor Harbison's excellent preliminary, rough draft on "The Assessment of Nation-Wide Learning Systems", I felt that the discussion of approaches to sector assessment bounced around some among these types of assessment without clear differentiations, and that the way the various considerations involved in doing sector assessment are dealt with may well be affected by the type of assessment sought.